

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 4, 2010

Ted Strickland
Governor
Riffe Center, 30th Floor
77 South High Street
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Governor Strickland:

I have followed with great interest the Ohio Department of Transportation's (ODOT) efforts to build a replacement for the Innerbelt Bridge in downtown Cleveland. Sadly this bridge—critical both locally and nationally—has become a symbol of our nation's aging and crumbling infrastructure. As evidence regarding safety concerns has emerged, it has become clear that replacing this critical artery is one of Ohio's most urgent transportation needs. Yet with a recent spate of positive news on the Innerbelt, it now seems that a new, safer bridge appears closer than ever.

This new bridge will be more than just a way over the Cuyahoga; it represents an opportunity to increase the livability of the city and will serve as a gateway to Cleveland. During your administration, the Ohio Department of Transportation—more than at any other time in its history—has pursued a multimodal approach to transportation and increased investment in rail, bike, and pedestrian friendly projects. There is ample reason to do this: moving freight and cargo to rail alleviates overdue burden on our roads, improves safety for pedestrians, and helps promote our state as a leader in sustainable modes of transportation.

Yet I have recently heard from our constituents about perceived resistance from ODOT to including a multi-purpose bike and pedestrian path on the “new” Innerbelt. With a strong and growing bicycling community in Cleveland, a sizeable carless population, and new development in nearby neighborhoods, it would be penny wise and pound foolish to build this bridge with only cars and trucks in mind.

I understand there is some concern that to re-examine this issue could jeopardize American Recovery and Reinvestment Funds the state has dedicated to this project. Yet, it is my understanding that, by working closely with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), it would be possible to undertake the proper environmental and logistical studies *without* losing ARRA funding. If this is in fact the case, ODOT must quickly act to begin this process.

Rebuilding the Innerbelt Bridge is a top priority for the tens of thousands of Ohioans who drive I-90 everyday and I appreciate the urgency, dedication, and countless hours the employees of ODOT have spent on this project. But we can only do this project once and it is critical that we do it right. It is imperative that when construction begins on the new Innerbelt a bike and pedestrian path is included. I strongly encourage ODOT to revisit this issue with FHWA and make sure this is a bridge that works for all Clevelanders.

Sincerely,


Sherrod Brown
United States Senator